



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

NMFS Requests Comments on the Issuance of Exempted Fishing Permits, Scientific Research Permits, Display Permits, Letters of Acknowledgment, and Chartering Permits for the Collection of Atlantic HMS During 2011

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces its intent to issue Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs), Scientific Research Permits (SRPs), Display Permits, Letters of Acknowledgment (LOAs), and Chartering Permits for the collection of Atlantic highly migratory species (HMS) in 2011. In general, EFPs and related permits would authorize collection of a limited number of tunas, swordfish, billfishes, and sharks from Federal waters in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico for the purposes of scientific data collection and public display. Chartering permits allow the collection of HMS on the high seas or in the Exclusive Economic Zone of other nations.

NMFS issued 25 EFPs, SRPs, Display Permits, and LOAs in 2009 and has issued 21 such permits in 2010 to date. These permits were issued to vessels and authorized samplers participating in at-sea observer programs in 2009. In 2010, at-sea observer programs were not required to carry EFPs to conduct scientific research per a final rule published on August 25, 2009 (74 FR 42786). In addition, these permits were issued to NMFS and non-NMFS scientists collecting data on HMS, educational institutions, public aquaria, and collectors acquiring HMS for display in 2009 and 2010, among others. NMFS also issued scientific research permits and amendments to current permits issued under the exempted fishing program for research related to the Deepwater Horizon/BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. As of October 2010, an additional eight permits and/or amendments have been issued and focus on research related to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Exempted fishing permit applications would continue to be considered for issuance in 2011 for bycatch reduction research in closed areas of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea to test gear modifications and fishing techniques aimed at avoiding incidental capture of non-target species. NMFS will seek additional public comment, as necessary, on any such specific proposals where research is not being conducted solely from *bona fide* research vessels. For example, NMFS is considering the creation of an electronic monitoring (EM) pilot program that could allow commercial fishing vessels outfitted with EM gear to conduct limited fishing trips inside closed areas to test the effectiveness of such a system as a means of monitoring bycatch. If NMFS decides to move forward with such a program, NMFS would provide the public with an opportunity to comment, as necessary and appropriate.

On January 3, 2008, NMFS announced a final decision to issue EFPs to conduct research in portions of the East Florida Coast (EFC) and Charleston Bump closed areas using a limited number of pelagic longline (PLL) vessels. The goals of the research are to collect baseline data in closed areas under current PLL fishery conditions; evaluate existing PLL

bycatch reduction measures; and, collect data to examine the effectiveness of existing PLL area closures to meet current conservation and harvesting goals. This research concluded on September 30, 2010, and a final report is forthcoming. NMFS does not intend to issue any additional permits as a result of this research.

Written comments on these proposed collection, research, and fishing activities will be considered by NMFS when issuing EFPs, SRPs, Display Permits, and Chartering Permits if received on or before 5 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, on January 3, 2011. Please send comments to Craig Cockrell, Highly Migratory Species Management Division (F/SF1), NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. The permit applications and copies of the regulations pertaining to EFPs, SRPs, LOAs, Display Permits, and Chartering Permits may also be requested from this address. Comments may also be sent via facsimile (fax) to (301) 713-1917 or by e-mail to HMSEFP.2011@noaa.gov.

This notice is a courtesy to individuals interested in HMS fisheries activities to keep you informed about the fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information, contact Craig Cockrell at (301) 713-2347 or Jackie Wilson at 240-338-3936.



Emily Menashes
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries

DEC 08 2010

Date

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